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### 'Small ball' big for Majors grab series opener

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Sat, July 29, 2006

By **ERIC BENDER**, FREE PRESS SPORTS REPORTER

The London Majors woke up in time last night at Labatt Park to do what they do best and win their opening playoff game 8-3 over the Kitchener Panthers.

"That inning we needed," said Majors field manager Roop Chanderdat. "We went to small ball -- three bunts in a row."

Chanderdat was referring to the sixth inning with the Majors trailing 2-1.

Catcher Chad McKellar walked and left-fielder Rudy Vallejos bunted safely. Second baseman Kyle Piwowarczyk put down a difficult bunt and a wild throw to first scored McKellar and Vallejos for the lead, with Piwowarczyk going to second.

Centre-fielder Brad McElroy bunted safely, moving Piwowarczyk to third. A single by third baseman Peter Babcock scored Piwowarczyk with what proved to be the winning run.

The Majors take a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven quarter-final. Game 2 is in Kitchener tomorrow at 7 p.m. Game 3 is at Labatt Park Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.

Panthers pitcher Ian Haegan, who held the Majors in check through seven innings, took the loss.

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It was his teammates who let him down with errors. In the sixth inning, the Majors scored just one earned run.

Majors starting pitcher Erick Perez got the win, working seven innings before reliever Josh Palmer finished.

Palmer gave up a run in the eighth as Kitchener closed within one.

But timely hits in the Majors' eighth produced four runs, putting it away.

It was Kitchener's fourth game in four nights as the Panthers finished the regular season with makeup games.

Perez held the Majors in check until the league's leading offence got rolling, said McKellar.

"Perez was doing his job on the mound. The offence was lacking a little bit, so it was helpful that Perez was getting outs. And hitting is contagious," he said.

Perez was fooling batters with an agonizing slow pitch.

"I don't know really what you call it," McKellar said. "It's a changeup. It's like he's got a string on it. You can yank it back."

Chanderdat said it's like an eephus pitch.

It helped that the Majors went error free. The Panthers committed four boots. Hits were even at eight apiece.

Outfielder Kevin Virtue and Babcock had two hits each and shortstop Mike Ambrose and Vallejos scored two runs each. Babcock had two RBIs.

Kitchener's top two in the lineup, first baseman Luke Baker and right-fielder Mike Roeder, had two hits each.

The Majors plan to start Hiarali Garcia, 4-2 with one save, tomorrow.

**MAJORS 8 PANTHERS 3**

London leads 1-0.

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'Small ball' big for Majors grab series opener

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